



Medication Health & Safety

You play an important role in making sure medications work best for you and your family. These days, people often see more than one doctor. Each one of them may prescribe one or more medications. As a result, your physicians will be unaware of the various drugs you are taking. You can help avoid dangerous drug interactions *and* get the most benefit from your drugs with a little preparation.

It also makes sense to try to use the *same pharmacy* for all your prescriptions, if possible. The pharmacy's recordkeeping system may flag potential drug interaction problems.

Before you see the doctor:

- keep an up-to-date list of all the prescription drugs you take, as well as any over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, or supplements you use regularly; make a note of the physician who prescribed it, for what condition, the dosing, and the date
- write down any questions you have about your existing medications, especially any side-effects you believe they have caused—these include new symptoms that you may not think are obviously related to your medicines, since some reactions and side-effects may occur many months after starting a new medication

When you have a doctor's appointment:

- take your list of drugs with you
- or, put all your prescription drugs, over-the-counter medicines, and supplements in a bag and take that with you
- take your list of questions and ask the two or three you think are most important first (you may not have a chance to cover them all)
- If your physician prescribes a new medication, be sure to discuss:
 - any allergies or bad reactions you have had to drugs in the past
 - what you should expect from the new drug, whether there are potential side effects, and what to do about them
 - how to take the medication and whether there are foods, drinks, other medications, or activities you should avoid and
 - whether there is a generic version you can use
- for women, whether you are or might be pregnant, whether you are planning to become pregnant, whether you are breastfeeding

When you drop off your prescription at the pharmacy, you have a chance to ask the pharmacist questions, too:

- whether there is a generic version you can use
- how many refills the prescription has
- how the medicine should be stored

- if you have trouble opening child-resistant containers and there are no children in the home or likely to visit, ask for easy-to-open packaging

When you pick up your prescription:

- double-check that you've been given the right drug
- be sure you know the right dose and how often to take it
- if it's a liquid, see whether you need a special drug measuring spoon, cup, or syringe
- make sure you have an information sheet about the drug, in case you have questions later

At home:

- add your new medication to your "master list" and make a note if you think it causes any side effects
- carefully follow your doctor's instructions for taking the drug
- don't let anyone else take your medication (and don't take theirs)
- store the drug at proper temperature and in a safe place, out of the sight and reach of children

Helpful Tools

MedlinePlus A place to learn about the latest treatments, look up information on a drug or supplement, find out the meanings of words, or view medical videos or illustrations. You can also learn about your prescription drugs and over-the-counter medicines. Includes side effects, dosage, special precautions, and more. Link to the U.S. National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health (NIH): <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/>

Medicines in My Home (MIMH) is a multimedia educational program to teach consumers from adolescence through adulthood how to choose over-the-counter medicines and use them safely. "Rooms" of the program contain presentation and print materials that teachers, students and adults can use online or download. Link to the U.S. Federal Drug Administration: <http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/BuyingUsingMedicineSafely/UnderstandingOver-the-CounterMedicines/ucm092139.htm>

Medication Guides are paper handouts that come with many prescription medicines. The guides address issues that are specific to particular drugs and drug classes, and they contain FDA-approved information that can help patients avoid serious adverse events.

Source: <http://www.gphaonline.org/engage/discussing-my-prescription>



Safe Disposal of Medication:

From the NH Department of Environmental Services:

The state of New Hampshire is working with stakeholders to develop information and tools to assist people with safely disposing medicine in various settings. Improper handling, storage or disposal of medicine can lead to drug abuse, accidental poisonings and environmental pollution.

Learn more at: <http://nh.gov/medsafety>